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ABSTRACT

It is suggested that student personnel workers in higher education have comparable responsibilities to their academic counterparts as "educators" in a literal sense. Each contact with a student by personnel officers should be viewed as an opportunity for facilitating learning and growth. As such, a responsibility for being conversant with and open to discussion of matters integral to the (local) student culture rests squarely on student affairs personnel. Essential interaction can hardly be a mutually profitable occurrence without acceptance of such a duty. In addition to such day-to-day interaction whereby developmental opportunities are inherent in the interchange with students, planned activities should be offered to complement the classroom situation. Such co-curricular offerings should center about vital issues and contemporary topics not dealt with in traditional academic courses. Examples of several such program approaches are presented and a schema for assigning responsibility for the organization and sponsorship of such programs is outlined. (Author)

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STUDENT PERSONNEL "EDUCATORS"[1]

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It is suggested that student personnel workers in higher education have comparable responsibilities to their academic counterparts as "educators" in a literal sense. Each contact with a student by personnel officers should be viewed as an opportunity for facilitating learning and growth. As such, a responsibility for being conversant with and open to discussion of matters integral to the (local) student culture rests squarely on student affairs personnel. Essential interaction can hardly be a mutually profitable occurence without acceptance of such a duty.

I speak here of the kind of facilitating that is accomplished both by the provision of service and, more integrally, by allowing for the tenor of interaction to provide "modeling behavior." "Modeling behavior" in this sense is a reference to acting in such a manner as to encourage emulation. This seems to me to be a too-frequently ignored component of the educational process. Certainly, there are none still persevering in the camp which would confine "education" to the classroom, especially not

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among our numbers, anyway!

In addition to such day-to-day interaction whereby developmental opportunities are inherent in the normal interchange with students, I should like to describe our model for supplementing classroom learning.

First, it is necessary to place the organization of our segment of student affairs in perspective. The Office of Counseling and Student Development, as we are titled, is, more than any other, the "consultative" facet of student affairs. As such, our primary goal and guiding philosophy is ". . . to optimize the resourcefulness of the whole campus in order to actualize the total learning experience of the entire college community." In light of this, we feel that our role of enhancing the higher education experience is very literally that of "educator", especially as alluded to earlier.

There are really two indentifiable aspects to our office, i.e., the Counseling Center and its clinical operations, and the programming designed to promote growth and development, primarily that of students. Our first bias is a contention that the bulk of counseling on a college campus is actually supportive, facilitative interaction which equates with our

idea of what an "educator" really is or should be. There are probably some who would argue this point, but I think most of the argument would melt into a pool of semantics. However, we do not feel we can abandon the therapeutic needs of the college, and thus we have a staff competent to and cognizant of such needs. I'll say more on the interface of counseling with student development programming later.

The other primary thrust of our work is that of promoting student development. I will devote the bulk of this paper to describing an organizational format and some programs in which we have invested our energies toward co-curricular education in both of these realms.

In planning for the provision of such developmental opportunities, one must, first of all, have the staff to carry out such a scheme. Staffing for a developmental thrust is a crucial prerequisite. We are extremely fortunate in this regard, as we have been able to recruit and hire dynamic people who see things through from conception to fruition. No less crucial in many respects is institutional commitment, and here too, we have been blessed with solid administrative backing.

Now, on to the organizational structure under which we operate.

Following the chain of responsibility down from the President to the Vice-President for Student Affairs, we come to an overall Director of Counseling and Student Development. The Director's charge is essentially one of coordinating efforts in meeting the needs of the College community. Essentially he provides leadership for planning, staffing, and budgetary concerns. Assisting the Director in this duty is an Advisory Board which consists of students, faculty, and administrators from all classes, divisions, and segments of the College, plus a number of non-college resource people, e.g. a state secondary school administrator, director of a community mental health clinic, etc. The Advisory Board meets as a whole with the staff once a month and is available at other times for individual consultation as needed. This year the Board numbers fifteen (15). The charge to this select yet volunteer group is simply to be a source of input and feedback--both as individuals and totally--in the first-hand assessment of program impact and efficacy. They further serve as ready resources in supplementing our own personnel. This area of the Office is just beginning to reveal the scope of its potential worth to our total operation.

Within the Student Development component of the Office is housed the "Student Support Project," which is partially a federally funded program geared toward the provision of the raft of supportive experiences--both academic and non-academic--aimed at bolstering the levels of adjustment of so-called culturally different students or those who heretofore were systematically excluded from normal college preparatory tracks. Two members of the professional staff are responsible for coordinating and administering this phase of the program.

Within the Project and its purview are the gamut of remedial communications skills services and a campus-wide tutorial program encompassing all disciplines. Both are open to all students with special focus on servicing a number whose admission was under the Project's aegis. Much more could be said of this aspect of student development programming, but for present purposes suffice it to say that we feel this program is making an increasingly wider and deeper impact on the total educational experience at Rhode Island College.

In attempting both to optimize the capabilities of our personnel, and to implement further programming concerns, we designed a scheme of

coordinator assignments around the perceived needs of the college community, and the particular skills of the staff.

I'll briefly list these and elaborate on some of the outgrowths of programming in each area:

The first is the coordinator of counseling services who is responsible for counseling center staffing and the clinical component in toto. In this area fall the duties of seeing to adequate and accessible staffing patterns for counseling services. In addition one-to-one appointments in the short-term therapy mode, there are provisions for drop-in counseling at all times of the day and in the evenings at a satellite location on campus. Further, this coordinator has initiated what we call "freelancing patterns" of outreach, wherein counselors spend substantial hours each week in providing "at-large" accessibility, particularly in heavy student traffic areas. This latter move seems almost mandatory on a commuter campus such as ours, where six out of every seven students live off campus.

Student assistants, both graduate and undergraduate as well as interns and clerical staff are also the administrative concern of the coordinator of counseling services, as are in-service clinical experiences for the staff.

The second is the coordinator of group experiences, whose charge is the provision of such group programs as are deemed appropriate. The demands on this area have far exceeded our capability to service them fully, but the following are representative of sponsored group experiences offered this year: Weekly Human Relations Groups, Weekend Encounter laboratories,

Leadership Laboratory Weekends, Therapy Groups, Micro-labs for Education Practicum students, Self-Awareness Groups, and Communications Skills Sessions. The demands for group experiences will heavily determine our hiring patterns for the immediate future, if this year is any index.

The third is the coordinator of academic liaison programs, whose responsibility is the integration of co-curricular experiences with both faculty personnel and curricular plans. A large portion of the duties inherent in this role call for the "education" of faculty regarding the co-curriculum, and co-opting of their resources in extending the educational process beyond the classroom. Training in skills for advisement, co-sponsoring in-service seminars where recent graduates provide retrospective feedback to departments as to the relevance of their educational training, initiating proposals for the restructuring of the total academic advisory system, training faculty in "attending behavior," offering seminars for non-traditional teaching approaches, offering credit and non-credit short-term or mini-courses, are exemplary of the type of programs issuing from this coordinating effort.

The fourth is the coordinator of testing and research programs, whose duties are largely psychometric in nature, providing us with a base for self-assessment of program effects and outcomes. In this area we have begun to draw a data base for a variety of assessment needs, including assaying student characteristics, initiating longitudinal studies of sub-groups of the student population, surveying campus-wide attitudes and perceptions, and implementing an institutional self-study. A concerted focus of our research this year has been to scrutinize the outcomes of our manifold impingements on the college community in both the counseling and student development areas. As our office serves as the

initiating source for students voluntarily withdrawing from college, this topic is receiving long overdue research treatment. Systematic testing programs, including a "new student battery," and a vocational planning program are under this coordinator's wing, as is the interpretive feedback of test results in individual and small group formats.

Also, where sufficient numbers of incoming students enter from the same class and school, we are beginning to provide graphic data and consultation as to the nature and characteristics of a particular secondary institutions' graduates who matriculate at Rhode Island College.

Finally, this aspect of the Office serves to coordinate and consult on evaluative segments of orientation and other student life programs, classroom assessment procedures, and surveys of a variety of natures. This entire coordinative function of research and testing has proven invaluable in the brief tenure that it has been operative.

The fifth is the coordinator of intra-divisional education and consultation whose duties include maintaining liaison and support with colleagues in the Division of Student Affairs, non-academic administrators and non-professional staff. This position is the site of brainstorming and experimental proposal-making for anything not directly covered by other coordinative responsibilities. Essentially, this person is the individual responsible for consulting with the rest of the Student Affairs Division staff on program matters. Here too, lies the area of functional overlap from program to program. As a result of the latitude and diverse attention possible in this role, we have begun to offer such opportunities for growth and development as para-

professional training for a number of areas including counseling, academic support, community service, student volunteers, and so on.

A semester-long series of co-curricular learning experiences utilizing a media-discussion group format is being offered focusing on vital contemporary issues. A serendipital outcome of this series, which is called "Perspectives", has been the implementation of several in-depth symposia, some curricular adaptations and course proposals, and an increased ability to just generally focus in more sharply on a myriad of student and campus needs and desires.

As an outgrowth of this coordinator's efforts, the whole of student life regulations is undergoing revision presently. Also, sorority and fraternity programs have been affected with plans for training sessions for pledge trainers in the works for next fall.

Following the lead of some larger universities, a series of tapes and descriptive brochures relative to academic programs and ultimate careers is being put together for future student use.

Courses in "Personal Development" will be offered next year following an extensive effort at formulating such co-curricular offerings by the fifth area coordinator.

A model for mobilizing critical segments of the campus community for crisis intervention is another recent outgrowth of this aspect of the program.

Also, we have lobbied successfully for appointment of members of the Office's staff to active membership on several major policy-making and otherwise student-affecting committees. This allows for more facile input in a great variety of situations in the politico-educational machinery at the college.

Finally, in-service educational programs for the student affairs division are the responsibility of a committee chaired by this coordinator.

Overall, the model I've outlined has shown to be a most flexible manageable schema for the delivery of counseling and student development services. A most recent assessment of our part in the educational process has resulted in two changes being proposed for next year. Beyond a commitment to continuing the efforts and directions begun this year, we are determined to make increased thrusts toward interacting with and engaging more faculty in the total program. This seems a natural next step in the attempt at optimizing all the resources of the college community.

Second, decentralization is in the works for next fall. Given the overwhelming proportion of commuters among our student body, the extension of accessibility to multiple bases seems to be called for. Though not finalized, planning along this line will probably lead to servicing the campus from three or four different satellite locations.

As then--ACPA President Bernard R. Black stated in his Presidential Address at Dallas in 1967, "Opportunities for development do not just

happen; they are made. Within a broad and holistic concept of education lie possibilities for college student personnel workers to use their knowledge and ingenuity to devise programs that will provide opportunities for students to develop."

It is our feeling that we have begun to take these words to heart and make some inroads in facilitating such educational growth and development. Hopefully, we too are growing in our efforts to become student personnel "educators."